

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* in Tanzania and its status in Africa

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Un Aigle criard *Aquila clanga* a été vu près de Hedara, dans le nord de la Tanzanie, le 31 décembre 1998. Ceci constitue la première observation directe de cette espèce dans le pays; sa présence en Tanzanie avait toutefois déjà été constatée par satellite en 1996 et 1997, grâce à un individu équipé d'un émetteur radio. L'Aigle criard est un visiteur Paléarctique assez rare sur le continent. Un aperçu est présenté de sa distribution africaine. Vu la rareté de l'espèce, il est estimé que 10 à 20 individus seulement hivernent au sud de l'équateur.

On 31 December 1998, we found a Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* near Hedara (=Hedaru), northern Tanzania (04°30'S 37°54'E). The bird had been feeding on a Kirk's Dik-dik *Madoqua kirkii* along a tarmac road. On our approach it flew to a small *Acacia*, where it perched beside a Tawny Eagle *A. rapax* and allowed prolonged observation from a distance of c25 m. It was a very dark, uniformly blackish brown, rather stocky and massive eagle, noticeably larger and heavier than its pale fulvous-brown companion. The bill was bluish grey with a yellow cere and the yellow gape extended to below the centre of the eye, which was dark.

After having observed the birds at length through binoculars and telescopes, we flushed them in order to observe their flight patterns. In flight, the larger eagle had a more compact shape than the Tawny Eagle, with broad wings, a relatively short, rounded tail and a less protruding head. Flight and tail feathers appeared uniformly blackish. There was no contrast between the wing-coverts and flight feathers. Other features included a narrow whitish crescent on the uppertail-coverts, a small pale patch on the back, and a small pale patch, formed by whitish feather shafts, at the base of the blackish primaries.

The combination of large size, compact shape, uniform blackish brown plumage, medium gape length and dark eye colour are characteristic of adult Greater Spotted Eagle (Forsman 1999). Lesser Spotted Eagle, the principal confusion species, typically has a more contrasting, paler brown plumage, in which the paler wing-coverts contrast with the darker remiges. It also has a pale, not dark, iris¹⁶. Steppe Eagle has a conspicuously long gape extending to below the rear of the eye.

This appears to be the first sighting of Greater Spotted Eagle in Tanzania, although the species has recently been tracked by satellite above Tanzanian territory. The male of a pair fitted with a satellite transmitter on its breeding grounds in Biebrza National Park, north-east Poland, in July 1996, was tracked to its wintering grounds in Zambia, via Uganda and western Tanzania; it crossed the Tanzania-Zambia border on 17 or 18 December 1996. The

following year, on 23 November, the same bird was once again located in Tanzania, 20 km north of the Zambian border and 54 km east of Lake Tanganyika, before it returned to exactly the same wintering site in South Luangwa National Park⁷.

The species, which is classified as Vulnerable², is a rare Palearctic winter visitor to Africa. In Egypt, it is a rare winter visitor and passage migrant through Sinai and the Red Sea Mountains during mid-September-early May⁵. Most birds reaching sub-Saharan Africa appear to winter in the Ethiopian highlands, where the species has been recorded from October-March¹⁵. In Eritrea it was formerly reported as a common passage migrant in November, with some birds wintering¹¹; its present status is unknown. In Sudan it has been recorded a few times on passage in November and February-April in the northern and eastern parts of the country⁸. There are 12 accepted records from Kenya, principally from the vicinity of the Rift Valley lakes¹⁶. The satellite-tracked bird mentioned above constituted the first definite record south of Kenya; it was also the first species to be admitted to the Zambian list without having been seen by an observer within Zambia⁶. The same should now apply to the Ugandan list: although included by Britton¹, the species was subsequently removed from the list because no satisfactory substantiation could be obtained from the observer⁹ and it has not subsequently been reported from the country^{3,10}. There is a possible sighting from South Africa, at Nylsvlei in early 1998, but this has yet to be confirmed⁶.

In West Africa, Greater Spotted Eagle has only been recorded with certainty in Chad and Cameroon. In Chad, a female was trapped near N'Djamena on 22 January 1971¹⁵ and the female of the pair tracked by satellite in 1996 spent the winter in the country⁷. In Cameroon, the species has been observed twice in the north, in February and / or April 1973, but has not been reported since^{12,13}.

Given the species' rarity, Meyburg *et al* estimate that probably only 10-20 birds may winter south of the Equator.

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